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FRENCH

AVIATION

TODAY

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Airbus

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action

"Technical problems have been minor. The behaviour of the A300 has been very good and much better than that of the 747 immediately after its entry into service."—CLAUDE LALANNE, vice-president commercial of Air France, talking to CHARLES HEATHCOTE-SMITH in Paris last week.

THE Airbus entered service with Air France between
Paris and London on May 23. The airline now has three
aircraft and is using them on a network linking Paris
with Nice, Algiers and Marseilles as well as with the
British capital. Three more A300s will be introduced
next year and Madrid, Barcelona, Milan, Athens, Tunis and Tel Aviv will be added to the list of destinations. At present most of Air France's Airbus operations are carried out on Paris-London. This route supports 33 flights a week. A daily flight is offered between Paris and Nice in conjunction with the French domestic carrier, Air Inter, and Algiers is linked to Paris and Nice.
Air France has had to live with the fact that the A300
is larger than the aircraft operated by other carriers over the same routes. This has meant that the number of daily services on offer has had to be reduced on those routes on which it is in pool. This has been overcome in two ways. The route structure splits neatly into two categories: there are those such as Paris-London and Paris-Milan which are largely supported by business traffic and which offer passengers a wide choice of services; and there are thinner routes such as Paris-Algiers or Paris-Tunis which are patronised by non-business passengers who are not as concerned about flight timings. This has enabled Air France to operate the fleet fairly steadily throughout the day. During the morning and late-afternoon peak periods the aircraft operate to the business destinations, and to other points during the middle of the day. When British Airways enters the London-Paris market with TriStar at the beginning of next year the boot will be on the other foot and Air France will find that its bargaining position within the pool will be improved. But the aircraft itself is proving to be a positive asset. Air France's vice-president commercial, Claude Lalanne, told Flight earlier this month that "the aircraft has been cheaper to operate than we thought. There have been no problems with its entry into service; it's been much better than the 727 was." Load factors on London-Paris have been good: last month

they averaged 70-4 per cent while the overall load factor for all Air France's operations on the route was 68 per cent. On Nice and Algiers load factors have been running at about the same level as those of other aircraft, despite the fact that the A300 is half as large again as the equip-ment it replaced. Despatch reliability to 15min has been good. Between the entry into service and the end of last month Air France's Airbus fleet recorded 52 technical de-lays for 1,252 take-offs. Six were caused by engine prob-lems, five by hydraulics or electrics, 12 by air traffic control difficulties and 41 by other technical snags. Airbus Industrie is claiming a despatch reliability to 5min of around 98 per cent, some two points better than Air France's figures to 15min seem to indicate. But many of the delays have not been the fault of the aircraft. ATC delays cannot be laid at the manufacturer's door and there have been problems with cargo-loading machinery bought specifically for the A300 but not the responsibility of Airbus Industrie.

Passenger appeal
Passengers like the Airbus; this has been clear to those members of Flight staff who have flown on it. Greatly appreciated, says Lalanne, is the fact that passengers can carry two pieces of baggage on board and put them in the overhead baggage bins, which are twice as large as those on the 727. The truth of this remark was underlined when the writer returned to Heathrow after talking with M Lalanne clutching not only a briefcase but a newly acquired airline bag and resigned to the idea of having to check it in ait Charles de Gaulle. Also appreciated by passengers is the roominess of the cabin, particularly if they have just transferred from a long-haul wide-bodied aircraft.

While the aircraft itself is popular with travellers, there have been numerous complaints about the time taken to board it. Only at those airports that are without air jetties and where boarding is carried out using conventional